

Dear Chairman Martin:

I am writing to challenge the Comcast/Time Warner/Adelphia merger (FCC Docket No. 05-192) and the AT&T/BellSouth merger (FCC Docket No. 06-74). Allowing the largest telecommunications company and the two largest cable companies in the United States to grow even larger does not serve the public interest.

The concentration of power among a handful of media companies is a growing problem in this country. Though we have more channels available than ever before, they are increasingly falling under the control of a handful of giant corporations. This allows them to control the content and message of the news media. News is no longer objective, it is manipulated to give a biased viewpoint that follows the corporate media owner's personal view of the world. There are many news stories that are not being told about the current administration because they would prove the media's role in helping Bush perpetrate the lies that he told us to gain approval for the invasion of Iraq. Actually, he never did get a specific Declaration of War from Congress, which is required by the Constitution. The media glorifies this war and our nation's role in the destruction of Iraq, but will not talk about the fact that it was undertaken in violation of the Constitution. That is because George Bush is in bed with those who control the media. If a news anchor were to tell the truth about this, he would be fired. One major news anchor told Greg Palast in an interview that he had been ordered to not report any story that put George Bush in a bad light.

Many of us have resorted to the Internet to gain a more realistic picture of the world than we can get from the corporate controlled broadcast media. And now there is an effort by the large Internet providers to gain control of everything we read, everything we research, everything we discuss with other people and every web site we access. The cost of broadband service remains out of reach for most Americans and the Big Media companies want to keep control of that access by blocking efforts by non-profit groups and cities to provide low-cost or free wireless networks that would give high speed access to all citizens, not just those who can afford the prices established by the greedy corporations. Americans are hungry for more competition in services that would bring the costs down. However, these mergers will only starve Americans of this needed competition.

Allowing AT&T to combine with BellSouth will give the top three broadband providers control of over half of all broadband connections in the country. At the same time, the Time Warner/Comcast/Adelphia merger will give Comcast and Time Warner increased power over entire regions of the United States, allowing rates to rise even as the digital divide continues to grow.

The FCC should block these transactions or impose strict conditions to protect free speech and competition under its "public interest standard." If the FCC decides to allow either of these mergers, it should require the following conditions:

1. Subscribers must be able to choose from competitive Internet Service Providers ("open access"). The FCC should also ensure that these companies cannot discriminate against any Internet content or rival service and that every service will be treated exactly the same ("Network Neutrality").
2. Companies must be required to sell broadband access separate from video and telephone service, and at the same price ("naked broadband" or "unbundling").
3. Any subscriber must be able to connect any device to the network (such as a Wi-Fi router) that does not harm the network. All publicly owned and non-profit organizations must be allowed to provide Wi-Fi service to all citizens through these connections.
4. Take steps to protect public access programming ("PEG"). Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local governments. Likewise, telecommunications giants — like AT&T — are trying to eliminate the remaining vestiges of effective local oversight and control altogether.
5. Independent programmers must be able to reach subscribers. We are required to buy channels we don't want or need because providers of video service bundle them together.
6. Any company that owns both programming and video systems should be required to provide competitors with access to their regional sports and other programming needed to offer competing services, so consumers will still have real choices.
7. All providers should be required to provide at least a certain minimum amount of locally produced programming that would give exposure to local issues, local artists and local interests.

In conclusion, I insist that the FCC consider the interests of the people, rather than those of the corporate shareholders. Broadcasting is done through a _public_ license and should reflect the public interest, not whether the shareholders are making enough money. Many of us already have enough trouble trying to afford broadband or cable TV. Please don't make it even harder for us to find competitors, or make it easier for Comcast, Time Warner and AT&T to raise prices or block local and independent voices.